

# THE VAN CHAI AND ITS ROLE IN THE HIERARCHY OF FISHERIES ADMINISTRATION IN VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

The long history of the *van chai* system of Vietnam began several centuries ago with their establishment mainly in the lower and middle reaches of rivers northern Vietnam and in coastal lagoons in Central Vietnam, whereas those in marine embayments, like Ha Long Bay, and in enclosed coastal areas, like Tam Giang Lagoon, are of recent origin.

*Van chai* have played an important role in fisheries administration, principally by managing the numbers of fishers, tax collection, smoothing local social relations, and harmonizing fishing operations according to local customary behavior. In addition, they are the main focus of information exchange and transmission of knowledge within a local fishing community. *Van chai* emerged from agricultural villages and gradually engaged in community self-management. As a result, their administrative and social management patterns are heavily influenced by the characteristics of traditional Vietnamese culture. This strong emphasis on local communities in Vietnamese culture has naturally led to the diversity of cultural characteristics among the *van chai* of different localities. Here we describe the management and behavioral patterns of some *van chai* where historical and cultural values remain strong, and which are located close to feudal era capital centers. These are *van chai* in Co Do, Van Chai Dich Vy (in the North), and some *van chai* in Tam Giang Lagoon. We highlight the past and present roles of the *van chai* in the hierarchy of fisheries administration of Vietnam. These provide a foundation to rapidly restore and reconstruct a viable system fisheries co-management based on Vietnamese cultural roots, and not some abstract imported ideas.

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## 1: Introduction

### 1.1 The terms *van* and *chai*

The Vietnamese term “*van*” has two meanings (Dictionary of the Vietnamese Language, 1988)[1]. One is an organization of persons who follow the same profession. This sense approximates the English term “guild”. In a second meaning, as used among riverine fishermen, the term “*van*” means a “village”, i.e., *van* is an administrative unit. The term “*chai*” means “gear used by small-scale and artisanal fishermen”.

In earlier times the village was the common agriculture administrative unit of Viet Nam The term “village” is defined as a block of rural residents who form a specific settlement unit, and

which comprised the lowest level of administrative unit in the feudal era (Dictionary of the Vietnamese Language, 1988).

Because the term “*van*” is also an administrative unit which also includes the so-called “floating people”, who both reside in water bodies and on boats which they also use earn their living, the term “*van*” remains widely used to mean “floating village”. In this sense the population of a *van* includes all who live together on a section of the river; fishermen, various river boatmen, small-scale transportation workers and small traders. Thus the term “*van*” means a general community of riverine residents, but not people who live on land and who earn their living on rivers. A village of people who live on land but who earn their living on the rivers is called a “fishing village” (*Lang ca*), not a *van*.

In this article we use the term *van chai* to mean a community unit of people living on their boats and earning a living on the water bodies by water navigation, fishing in rivers or coastal areas with simple, small-scale gear, and of whom the majority is fishermen.

## **1.2 Types of *van chai***

There are two types of *van chai*: (1) the “floating village” (*van chai thuy cu*), and (2) land-based fishing communities (*lang ca*). The first is a group of fishers and their families who live permanently on their fishing boats, and who lack both a dwelling house on land and farm land. These are exemplified by the *van chai* at Cua Sot, along the Da and Red River or in Ha Long Bay, and Dam Thuy Dien, in Tam Giang Lagoon. Those floating villages always operate and make a living on rivers, estuaries or lagoons in the coastal areas and with the abundant aquatic resources.

The second type comprises a group of fishers who earn their living by fishing, but who have house on land, either along a beach or estuary or on an island. Some fishing families also cultivate vegetables or fruit trees (mainly coconut palms) and raise livestock around their houses, to provide for their own subsistence.

Vietnam has abundant and varied inland waters and wetlands, such that freshwater fish and fishing locations are almost ubiquitous. Most farmers in Viet Nam also use a variety of aquatic resources for family consumption, sale and livestock feed. Formerly, aquatic resources were easily available, although the number of full-time fishers was not high. Fishers live mainly along inland water bodies and in coastal areas. In those same places many farm families earn their living from capture fishery activities. In fact, they are so heavily dependent on aquatic resources that they are not really farmers, but full-time fishers, who live among farmers yet still belong to agricultural villages. However, only a few fishers live in agriculture villages, whose the customs and traditions they must follow.

## **1.3: The Geographical Distribution of “floating village” type *van chai***

There were relatively few “floating villages”, and they are not widely mentioned in the literature. Dao Duy Anh noted in his “Vietnam historical culture” [2], a study of floating villages at the beginning of the 20th century, stated that “Vietnam has many floating villages, namely Thuy Co Village or Chai Village, including the groups of fishers or boatman”.

However, he did not provide a number. Other sources indicate that the number of floating villages was not high. At the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup>-century in the provinces from the North to Ha Tinh Province there existed 70 floating units in 12 old towns. They were concentrated mainly in the former old town of Son Nam Ha (now part of Thai Binh and Nam Dinh provinces), Thanh Hoa (17) and old Son Tay Town (5) ( Hoang Thi Van Mai [5, p.5 ]). In the 1930s, there were about 90 floating hamlets or villages located in rivers and about 21 located along the coastal in the region between the Viet Nam-China border to the Tien Yen area (Nguyen Quang Trung Tien [7,p.24]).

In contrast, in the Central Region of Viet Nam (which extends from Thanh Hoa to Binh Thuan provinces), where rivers are short and the land mountainous, freshwater bodies cannot sustain fisheries large enough to support floating villages. The only such communities are concentrated in estuarine and sand dune areas, or in lagoons.

Since 1955 the number of floating villages has decreased, This has many reasons, but particularly the re-organization of rural management in both the North and South of Vietnam, the development of irrigation, the destructive exploitation of riverine resources, and water pollution. As a result, many floating village families switched to land-based living, or changed their occupations.

## **2 : Village Structure and Management: a prerequisite to understanding the *van chai***

For many centuries the village community has been basic administrative unit in Viet Nam. Since *van chai* originated from agricultural villages it is necessary to understand the village as basic unit society before examining the structure of the *van chai*.

From the proverb that “the King’s regulations are less known and important than the village customs and rules”, it has long been assumed that the Viet village was relatively independant of central authority, and that it was an autonomous, closed, independent small territory inside a larger country. That interpretation is not entirely accurate, however, because from 10th-century, as Viet Nam gradually became independent from China, central leaders always attempted to impose their will on the village. Owing to protracted civil war, however, the central government was distracted and incapable of manage down to the village level.

Thus the "five-notables or five chiefs" self-management system characterized agriculture villages. It comprised a mayor, deputy mayor, notable, secretary, and head night-watchman. The village mayor coordinated the general work of the village, in which he was assisted by the deputy village mayor. The village secretary assisted the council of the "five-chiefs". The village notable took care of such public construction as roads, the communal house, the temple, and the pagoda. The head night-watchman was responsible for village security. Each village had a series of hamlets with the hamlet heads. Besides implementing several responsibilities to the State such as supervising and speeding up tax and fee collection, labor corvee, and military conscription, the village managers dealt mainly with such internal affairs of the village security, funerals, weddings, and especially, the worship in the communal house.

However, centralization efforts were eventually revived. With its formation, the Later Le feudal regime focused immediately on the centralization of the national administrative system. In 1428, King Le Thai To subdivided Vietnam into a hierarchy of micro- meso- and macro-communes. Villages were ruled by a communal or village mandarin, who became the village chief during the regime of King Le Thanh Tong. The communal or village mandarin was subordinate to the district and *chau* authorities (administrative units of the central government). In addition to the village chief or mandarin, there was a "Council of Village Notables", comprised of the wealthy elite of a village.

The reforms made during the regimes of the first Le kings marked a turning-point in the natural resource control and management of the Central States during the feudal era. One of the most important issues concerned policies for state or public land. Public lands were reallocated to villagers every 6 years, based on their social status. Allocated lands could neither be sold nor inherited. The main objective during the Le regimes was to put public lands under the control of the Central government. In that the government was relatively successful in separating villages from their resources, which then became directly controlled by the central government.

However, from the middle of the 16th-century Viet Nam suffered again from civil wars, during which concerned the leadership more than the management of villages. As a consequence of the deterioration of the state power and attention, villages became increasingly autonomous and self-reliant as the rural population sought to ensure its own survival. As a result, by the end of the Le era village autonomy had so revived that the commune was the only administrative unit that the central government could manage.

To facilitate their rule, the French Colonial Administration retained the existing organization. However, they separated the country into three regions, each administered differently. The South (so-called "Cochinchina") was a colony, the Center (so-called "Annam") a protectorate, and the North (so-called "Tonkin") a protectorate, but under the direct French rule. As a result, although the villages were maintained, they were managed and ruled differently in the three regions. Regardless of location, during this period villagers had to obey both their existing leaders and also the French colonialist regime.

A communal authority system was introduced after 1945. As a result the relationship between the State and village/commune changed, as did the village/commune administrative structure. From 1945 to 1955, the Council of Village Notables was replaced with the Administrative Resistance Committee (during the anti-French War) and the Administrative Committee.

After 1975, the administrative structure was changed again, with the formation of the Communal People's Committee and the People's Council. The position of village/commune mayor and deputy village mayor became Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Communal People's Committee, a democratically elected committee that constitutes the lowest level of authority in the governmental system of Viet Nam.

## 2.1 The relationship of the *van chai* and the agricultural village

*Van chai* communities are adjacent to agricultural villages. From the beginning *van chai* were under the general administration of an agricultural village, and small-scale fishing communities originated from the farmer class of villagers, among whom they were the economically poorest.

The residents of *van chai* had no land and had to perform the least desirable jobs. They were scorned by society as people who "*live with no house and die with no land in which to be buried*", and denoted using discriminatory and demeaning terms (Nguyen Duy Thieu [6]). In the spirit of an agricultural and conservative feudal society with its strictly hierarchical organization, the landless that had to live on the lands of other villagers were always scorned and classified as *servants*. *Van chai* residents were particularly scorned because they had no land and were forced to live wherever they could, floating on boats. Although *van chai* was an administrative unit, with the same functions as any agricultural village, they were not ranked and treated equally as agricultural villages. Because of that, its residents were not allowed to sit equally with other farmers in the village communal house during events or festivals.

As a *van chai* gradually became overcrowded with many poor and mobile fishing families, their administration by agriculture villages became ineffective and difficult. Further, because a *van chai* lacked land, and the riverine fisheries resources could be freely caught, a *van chai* was of no benefit to agricultural villages. As a result, their administration ignored the *van chai* and allowed them the freedom to live and fish, and its members were neither required to perform public service nor assume village responsibilities. In that way most *van chai* have been gradually became separated from land-based agricultural villages, and developed into self-managed units, the traditional social characteristics of which have largely remained intact until the present.

The entire life of a *van chai* family, which averaged about 10 members, was spent only on their small boats (about 5m long and with a 2m beam), which were both their means of production and their dwelling. Nowadays, as their living conditions have improved, some *van chai* members have built floating houseboats for their elderly and children to live in. There is also now a tendency to for daughters and sons to live apart from their parents.

An important attribute that distinguishes a *van chai* from an agriculture village is that it lacks fixed boundaries, which nowadays are expanding as aquatic resources decline in abundance, which forces its members travel further to secure a catch. In contrast, agriculture villages always have a defined boundary.

Also, increasingly more *van chai* members leave life on the boats to live houses on land, which is reflected in administrative change of *van chai*. For example, *Moc van or Kieu Moc van* (one *van chai* in the old town of Thanh Oai, Son Tay before 1945) was under the administration of Co Do commune before the Land Reform of 1955. Now it is part of Ba Vi District, Ha Tay Province, and has been re-named Tan Tien *van*. Membership now totals about 70 households, and includes all fishermen, boatmen and transportation who live and work scattered along the system of Lo, Thao, Hong and Da rivers. Similarly, Vy *van* or Dich Vy *van* (an old commune of Dich Vy in Phung Thuong town, Phuc Tho District, Ha Tay Province) was a *van chai* on the Red River. Nowadays is administratively part of the two hamlets of Doan Ket (in Trung Chau Commune) and Thang Loi (in Hong Ha Commune) in

Dan Phuong District, Ha Tay Province. Although, this *van* is registered to a specific place, members live and work widely over the Red River system.

### **3: The administration of *van chai***

Originating from land-based villages, the *van chai* have a simplified version of the management system of agricultural villages. It has three main institutions: (1) Males 18 years-of-age and over, (2) The Council of Elders, and (3) Village Officials.

(1). Under the French Administration males 18 years-of-age had to pay a head tax, participate in the voting, and attend village meetings in the communal house, to solve problems of daily life and production.

(2) In theory The Council of Elders (local names varied by location) is elected by the citizens. However, in practice they include all the heads of family clans, who represent their members.

(3) Because there are fewer and less complex public works in a *van chai* compared with agricultural villages, the number of village officials is correspondingly less than in agricultural villages. There are four kinds: head of village, vice-head of village, village chief, and head of village watchmen. The authority system of the *van chai* performs several different kinds of tasks: (a) the same functions as agricultural villages; (2) the self-managed activities for the *van*; and (3) the administrative functions of the lowest level of the State management system. Unlike agricultural villages, one of the important missions of the *van* leader is as the officiating priest who heads religion in the *van chai*. This includes funerals, weddings, conflict resolution, and performing the annual rites and organizing the festivals.

According to the elders, when a *van* was formed one person was responsible for general management. After that the head of the *van* was elected. The *van* elders submitted a proposal to the town authorities to asking that their leader be accorded the same rights and obligations as the head of an agricultural villages. In addition to the head of the *van*, a council of *van* notables was also elected. Each family clan of a *van* nominated a representative to to the council, which in effect was a council of family heads, who were often the head of family clan. Then the *van* notable council assigned one of its member to be its chief. When any member of the leadership team either died or resigned, *van* had to elect a replacement, and this person had to be approved by the council of family heads. Nowadays Moc *van* (Co Do *van*) still has its head and four-member council of family heads. Thus, within an administration system of the *van chai*, the council of family heads played a very important role.

Should a district authority deny a *van's* proposal to establish their own and independant authority system to manage *van* affairs, then the *van* remained a water-based village belonging to the land-based commune. In that case a *van's* administration system would not be the lowest state administration unit (for example the case of Vy *van*, this *van* is only similar to a village of the Dich Vy commune). Although, those rules exist, a *van* has a relationship with the land-based commune only in terms of tax payment. There are no other linkages. Almost all of a *van's* membership retain an inferiority complex, which leads them

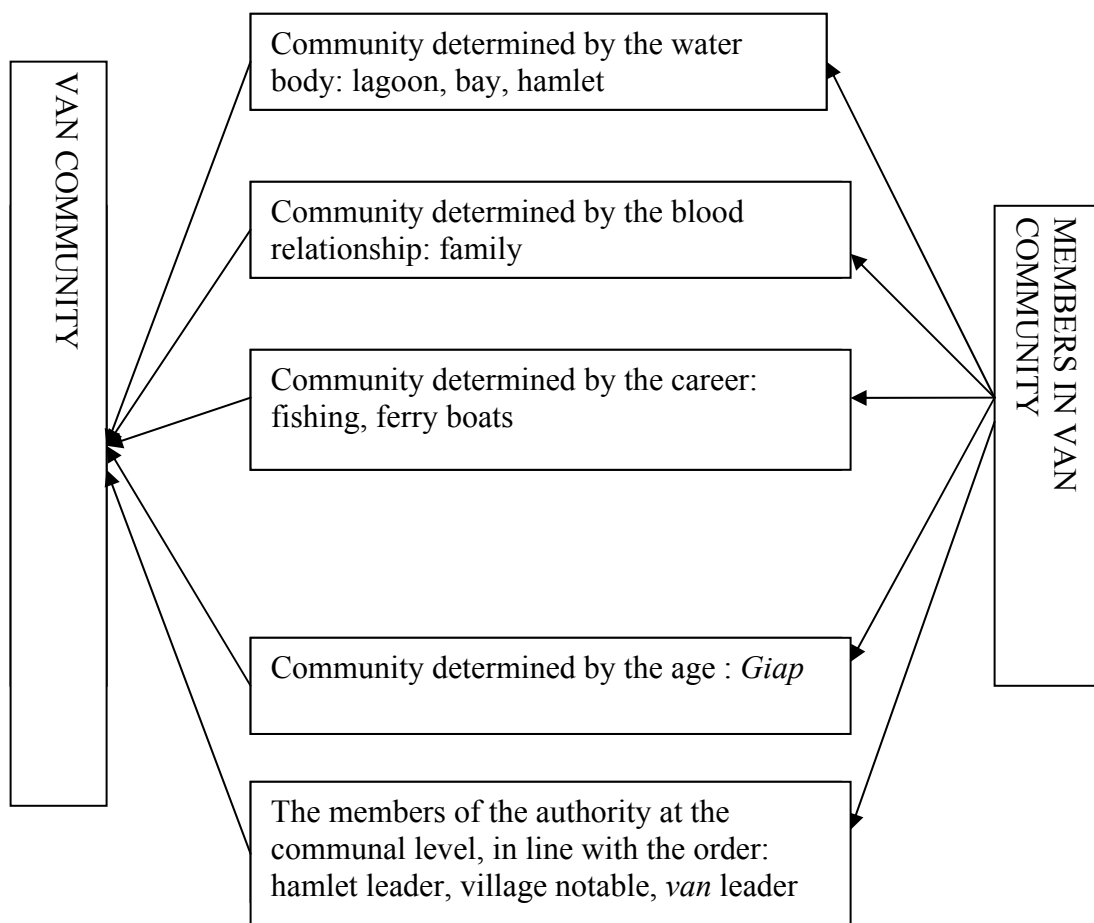
to connect only with other *van* members, and not with outsiders. As a result, the management functions of the *van* remain independent from the those of the agriculture commune, and all the leadership positions of the *van* remain in place and fully functioning.

### 3.1 Structure, relationships and institutional formulation in Van Chai

The membership principle of a *van chai* rests on the two key relationships of blood and profession, thus their social structure is simpler than that of agricultural villages.

The formation of a *van chai* starts with family relationships and then extends to a group of relatives who gradually intensify their professional and inter-personal relationships to produce a small society with its own specific characteristics.

The social structure of *van chai* membership (After Nguyen Duy Thieu [3, p. 72])



Relationships with such external societies as villagers-based took different forms, and did not involve administration and or dependency.

### **3.1.1: Community determined by water body**

The peripheral, smaller and shallower lagoons formed by wind and wave action and adjacent to main water bodies provide locations for *van* hamlets, like Bao hamlet in Tam Giang Lagoon and Xom hamlet in the Moc *van*. Such hamlets are not stable, but are relocated to follow the fishing activity. Some cases were moved for religious reasons. For example, while Catholic fishers of Moc Van are concentrated near by the of Co Do coast of Da River, other Buddhist fishers of this Van are grouped near by Trung Ha coast

There are key differences between the water-based hamlets of a *van chai* and a group of land-based hamlets in an agricultural village. One is that the latter have their own addresses based on their fixed location, whereas a water-based hamlet does not, since it is constantly mobile. Another is that whereas the communities of agricultural villages adhere to the territorial principle, and are linked with each other in a neighboring relationship, communities in the water-based hamlets/villages respect the blood and profession relationships. In a water-based hamlet, people with the same family name always use the same fishing gear and gather to form a hamlet. Other important differences are that a *van chai* hamlet lacks the well, public watch-post, Kitchen God temple, and security guard team that characterize land-based villages. So, compared with an agricultural village in general a *van chai* is a community unit that lacks real administrative spirit and meaning. Rather, it is a traditional, small, self-managed community.

### **3.1. 2: Community determined by the blood relationship or kinship**

The blood relationship among *van chai* residents is close, and each hamlet always includes a number of families with the same blood ties who live together and who are highly inter-dependent. This is demonstrated by boat mooring places in a lagoon, where 5 - 6 family boats will always all be moored together. These kinship groups constitute the basic administrative unit of the *van*, through their representatives in the *van council* meeting

In addition to being morally and materially supportive, the blood and family relationships of the *van chai* constitute an essential locus for the vital inter-generational transfer of technical knowledge and professional secrets. Such information was not normally communicated outside the small circle of family members.

### **3.1.3: Community determined by occupation: Van is only a residence place for fishermen**

*Van chai* type is determined by professional category, with, for example, fishermen using a particular gear type forming a *van*. In Vinh Ha Commune on Tam Giang Lagoon (Thua Thien Hue Province), for example, the 12 *van chai* are distinguished as follows: 2 *van sao* (hecks- a kind of bamboo fix hecks), Doan Dang *Van* (*van* doing hecks in shallow water), Cao Dang *Van* (*van* doing hecks in deep water), hook *vanhering* netting *van*, gillnets *van*, Big hecks *van* (Tran Van Tuan [8] Sometimes fishermen within a *van* may switch gear type according to season, as among those along the Bang Giang (Cao Bang Province), which all use trawling gear, casting-nets and traps (lò, cùp) depending on season and target species. The Moc and Vi *van* also use different fishing gears according to season.



However, sometimes there is occupational diversity within the membership of a *van chai*. For example, although the members of Ky Xuyen *van* use different fishing gears, such as fixed and hook gears, they lived together. Similarly, although most members of a *van* are fishermen, some earn a living by using their boats to ferry passengers or to transport goods. The number has been increasing continuously as fishermen and their children switch from fishing to these jobs, which are both more profitable and easier than fishing. However, that job change does not affect the attributes of the *van chai*, since everybody living within the *van chai* has to obey the same rules boat anchoring (see below), as well as following the traditional rites of the *van*.

#### **3.1.4: Community determined by the age class: Giap**

Originally the term “*giap*” referred to a Chinese administrative unit used for censusing (Nguyen Duy Thieu [ 6 ,p.102]). However, when imported to Viet Nam thousands of years ago the meaning changed, and it now means a place where village males of the same age class gather. Its official administrative meaning was discontinued. However, despite that ancient change of main meaning, the *giap* continues to play a particular administrative role in a *van chai*. Since, unlike agricultural villages, members of a *van chai* do possess neither taxable lands nor fixed residences, to record information on all village families the authorities operate through the *Giap* and family organizations. During the French colonial era, information was recorded in a “Registration Book” issued by the Taxation Agency. It contained the names of boat owners and all family members, their civil status, taxes paid, and conscription, among other information.

#### **3.2 Rules Governing a *van chai***

For the purposes of self management, the authority system of a *van chai* follows the traditional rules or conventions (*huong uoc*). Although *de facto* rules, locally these have *de jure* attributes. All such traditional conventions of the *van chai*, as in the land-based villages, are obeyed absolutely and to the letter.

Whereas *van chai* members, just like the farmers, would not normally know the regulations of the central government, they would be thoroughly familiar with the customs and rules of their villages/communes, as well as their village leader, *van* leader, or head of the village watchman. This explains the old proverb that “the King’s regulations are less known and important than the village customs and rules”. For many generations villagers knew and obeyed just their village rules. As a result, the Vietnamese village remains an invaluable and reliable repository of culturally based management and other knowledge. This is because all the villages rules, habits, family rules and customs and traditional conventions have been enforced and practiced very strictly and voluntarily, regardless of whether or not they were formalized in documents.

There are three main types of *van chai* rules and regulations: (1) those pertaining to the place and order of boat mooring (i.e., the residency rules of *van chai* members), (2) those regarding fishing rights, and (3) those on the fishing grounds and resource protection.

### 3.2.1 Rules on boat mooring (residency)

Although the fishermen of a *van chai* are highly mobile in their pursuit of the common resources of inland waters, they are not nomads. For administrative purposes they are considered as having a fixed residence at the place where they mainly moor their boat, and must register that address. When fishing elsewhere, they must register temporarily with the local authority. In their home water areas, only the *van* members are officially resident, so any outsider must obtain the permission of the local *van chai* to enter to avoid storms, sell fish, and buy supplies or fish. If permission is refused, and outsider must immediately move on.

### 3.2.2 Rules on fishing rights

Where a *van chai* used large fixed gears, such as big and small size hecks, different kind of traps, the fishing rights and the rights of the water management belong to the *van*, and are recognized and protected by the local state authority.

However, where the fish resources of a river or the sea are considered to be common public goods (i.e., “land is private, but water and fisheries resources are common”) they can be freely exploited by anybody. However, in the *van chai*, there was a priority rule for first-comers. Normally, the priority rule has the following contents:

- (a) If the fishing activities take place according to the direction of fish movement, later-comers have to drop their nets behind those of the first-comers, and they may neither impede nor interfere in any way with the first-comers’ nets.
- (b) When fishermen discover that fish are moving within a fishing ground, the first-comers may drop their net to catch the fish in their direction of movement, but late-comers must place their nets in a correct relationship to those of the first-comers.
- (c) Normally in the *van chai*, the allocation of places (*cho*) for boat mooring follows specific rules that establish their order of mooring. According to this order, the *van*’s boats are allowed to capture fish at certain times (*do*) during the day. In other words, the boats take turns to cast and haul their nets according their arranged order in *cho* and at the times defined in *do* (e.g., the person who moors his boat first may fish first in the time of his *do*, and so on until all have fished in turn).

Fishermen using nets in the *van chai* on the Bang River (Cao Bang Province) change the fishing order frequently. A man who was first at an earlier time goes to the end of the row of boats to fish last the following time, and so on. When using casting-nets, *van* members fish in a group of about 8-10 net owners and cast their nets only when commanded by the *van* leader.

Under those circumstances, and where there are an excessive number of fishermen, many the later-comers would not be able to catch fish. Although access is free, and outsiders may ask for access, if the *van* is already crowded new members would never receive an opportunity to catch fish, as they always have to wait at the end of the boat row in *van*’s locations. When an existing *van* developed rapidly and the number of *van*’s members become high (due to the new young families living apart from their parents), some of the members leave to find new

fishing-grounds, where they establish a new *van*. As a result, the number of residents of each *van* in the rivers or lagoons remained relatively stable

### 3.2.3 General rules for resource protection

Prior to the 1960s, aquatic resources were abundant in most locations throughout Viet Nam, and relatively cheap. There was little need for transport or storage facilities. Further, in those times aquatic environments were unpolluted and wetlands little changed, apart from their conversion to rice fields, such that fisheries resources were healthy and their protection only a minor concern. Nevertheless, in some places, use of destructive fishing gears was prohibited. For example, some *van* in Tam Giang Lagoon (Thua Thien Hue Province) banned the use of leaves of the *cay mat* (identification?) tree as a fish stupeficient, because they are too effective. Also, some *van chai* have rules on the mesh size. For example, the *Can Van* in Cao Bang Town commune has the general rule is that the net mesh size has to be over 2 cm (Nguyen Duy Thieu [6]). Nowadays, fishermen often strictly monitor each other to ensure that nobody uses either electric gears or dynamite for fishing. Violators are sent to the police for punishment.

## 4: Concluding Remarks

It is important to understand that although almost the rules and customs of the *van chai* have not been officially documented, nevertheless they have been in existence and obeyed very strictly for hundreds years. Those rules and customs, when legitimized become the *de jure* or legal foundation for the sustainable existence of the *van chai* and their strict and effective system of management. Also, based on the empirical assessment by the *van chai*, the productivity of the fishing-grounds has been demonstrated by the sustained fishing success of residents of each *van* in each lagoon or section of the river.

This empirical assessment was also a foundation for the previous government regimes to impose taxes on the large fixed fishing gears (small gear is not taxed) in inland waters, and also to assign the task of tax collection to either the local land based authority or to the leaders of a *van*. Based on the required amount of tax, the *van* fishermen discuss democratically among themselves to determine the amount of tax that each fishing point has to contribute to the *van's* leaders. All the residents of a *van* follow this decision.

The *van chai* is a grassroots organization that engages in aquatic resources management, particularly coastal resources, and contributes to poverty reduction within the local community. It also contributes to local security in its hamlet or hamlet cluster and manages other important social and cultural activities.

As demonstrated by its centuries of existence, the institution, rules, norms and customs of the *van chai* are consistent and well-grounded. They continue to perform necessary local functions and ensure the effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable management of fisheries resources. It requires a much wider and fuller appreciation among the broader community, and should be empowered and strengthened to better perform its roles and functions in the present day context of Viet Nam.

It is obviously that a lot of efforts have been done for management of small scale fisheries in Vietnam by centralized and legitimized approach, nevertheless this management approach has still not come of well as desired.

Is it for a small scale fisheries, the most politic and effective management approach is the management based more on the traditional experiences and people initiatives? And hope that we can learn from the traditional organization, institution manner and customs of Van Chai many things, for example, could base on the clan kinship, the religious kinship, the relationship between newcomers and people of previous dynasty, the method of fishing ground sharing, ...

The Ministry of Fisheries before and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development now is deploying the implementation of co-management approach to fisheries under support of DANIDA in program 'Fisheries Sector Program Support'. The substance of the Co-management is sharing the rights and responsibilities between government and resources users. But it could be better resolved only if there will a rational approach to the resources ownership issues and the institution in which self-government manner with the initiatives and traditions of the users and communities will be appreciated.

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